



Providing Support for Children and Families with Incarcerated Fathers:

Tips for Fatherhood Practitioners and Other Service Providers



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Family Assistance





of the parents
incarcerated in state and
federal prisons are
FATHERS

Maruschak et al., 2021



More than
FIVE
MILLION
U.S. CHILDREN

under 14 yrs old
have experienced
SEPARATION
from a parent due to
INCARCERATION

Murphey & Cooper, 2015

Providing Support for Children and Families with Incarcerated Fathers: Tips for Fatherhood Practitioners and Other Service Providers¹

Storm Ervin and Lindsey Cramer | Urban Institute
Nigel Vann | Fathers Incorporated

Overview of the Issue

This NRFC information brief draws on research on the impacts of parental incarceration for children and families and offers suggestions to help fatherhood programs, correctional agencies, and other community service providers support families impacted by incarceration.

Because responsive parental engagement serves as a key protective factor for children (Asok et al., 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019), it is critical to consider strategies that can mitigate the impacts of parental incarceration and lessen the effects of stress and trauma associated with parental separation. Although our focus is on support for children and families with incarcerated fathers (who represent the vast majority of parents incarcerated in state and federal prisons), many of the findings and strategies described here are also relevant for children and families with incarcerated mothers.

We begin with some key statistics² and a research overview of the impact of parental incarceration. In the two main sections, we suggest ways that fatherhood programs can work in partnership with 1) correctional agencies and 2) schools or other community service providers to provide support for incarcerated fathers, their children, and their families.



¹ Ervin, S., Cramer, L., & Vann, N. (2022). *Providing support for children and families with incarcerated fathers: Tips for fatherhood practitioners and other service providers*. [Information Brief]. National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.

² Note that these statistics are likely an underestimation due to the lack of systematic data collection in the United States on the number of parents who are incarcerated in federal and state prisons, as well as local or county jails. Also, these statistics do not include the experience of parental incarceration over a parent's or child's lifetime.

51% of children with
**PARENTS IN
STATE PRISON**
are younger than 10 yrs old

44% of children with
**PARENTS IN
FEDERAL PRISON**
are younger than 10 yrs old

Maruschak et al., 2021

 **40%** of fathers in
STATE PRISON
reported living with a minor child
at the time of their arrest

Wang, 2022

The Impact of Parental Incarceration

It is evident from the data and research that incarceration limits a father's ability to act as a protective factor and provide support to his children. It is also clear that children with incarcerated parents tend to suffer from stress, trauma, and stigmatization and often exhibit a broad variety of behavioral, emotional, health, and educational problems that are compounded by the pain of separation (Vann, 2021). In addition, caregivers³ may struggle with their own stress and trauma without relevant and adequate resources and supports. However, it is less clear whether parental incarceration is the main cause of these problematic outcomes or to what

extent children's and families' experiences prior to, during, or after a parent's incarceration (e.g., poverty, trauma, toxic stress, racism, health care, or education disparities) may have an impact (Shlafer et al., 2013). Moreover, we should not assume that all children with incarcerated parents are vulnerable and "at risk;" some children are more resilient than we realize, particularly if they live in supportive households or communities and have economic stability. On the other hand, children may feel a need to mask their distress with resiliency in order to combat stigma and make others less uncomfortable (Hollins, 2022).



³ For the purposes of this publication, we define caregiver as a child's nonincarcerated parent (custodial or noncustodial), coparent, or guardian.

Incarceration Compounds Other Co-Occurring Risk Factors

The incarceration of a family member often compounds other forms of disadvantage, such as those associated with living in poverty ... [and] increases children's risk of living in poverty or experiencing household instability. These risks are borne disproportionately by families of color, particularly African American families.

(Lindquist, et al., 2016, p. 2)

The Impact of Toxic Stress

Toxic stress can lead to problems with impulse control, exaggerated reactions to small uncertainties and losses, anti-social behavior, truancy, diminished school performance, separation and attachment problems, depression, eating and sleeping disorders, anxiety, and substance abuse.

(Lefer, 2014, p. 1)

Parental Incarceration is an Adverse Childhood Experience

Children or young adults who have had an incarcerated parent are more likely to have educational, economic, and mental and physical health problems than those unexposed. Parental incarceration has been classified as a particularly stigmatizing adverse childhood experience (ACE), disproportionately impacting children of color and children in poverty.

(Axelson & Boch, 2019)



DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS FOR BLACK, LATINO, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE⁴

- The criminal legal system disproportionately affects Black, Latino, and Indigenous people. For example, people in predominantly Black neighborhoods experience higher rates of police-initiated contact regardless of local crime rates.
- Black and Latino people are more likely to be arrested and imprisoned than white people. At the end of 2019:
 - Black people were imprisoned at a rate of 1,096 per 100,000 Black residents.
 - Latino people were imprisoned at a rate of 525 per 100,000 Latino residents.
 - White people were imprisoned at a rate of 214 per 100,000 white residents.
- In 2018–2019, 13 percent of Black children, 6 percent of Latino children, 6 percent of white children, and 1 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander children had ever had a parent incarcerated.
- Although Indigenous people account for approximately 1.5 percent of the total U.S. population, around 20 percent of American Indian children have had a parent incarcerated.



IMPACTS ON CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL, PHYSICAL, AND MENTAL HEALTH⁵

In spite of the ambiguity of causal patterns, research has provided significant indications that parental incarceration:

- Is associated with learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, behavioral or conduct problems, developmental delays, and speech or language problems for their children.
- Increases the chances that children will suffer from asthma; obesity; speech and language problems; epilepsy; hearing problems; vision problems; and bone, joint, and muscle problems.
- Can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

⁴ Information in this section is drawn from Haldipur, 2018; Carson, 2020; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021; and U.S. Census Bureau, 2021.

⁵ Information in this section is drawn from Turney & Haskins, 2014; Turney, 2014; and Morsy & Rothstein, 2016.



IMPACTS ON CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS⁶

- Children with incarcerated fathers are more likely to experience early grade retention than their counterparts.
- Experiencing paternal incarceration by age 5 is associated with lower non-cognitive school readiness (e.g., the ability to concentrate, stay on task, cooperate, interact with peers, and exercise emotional self-regulation).
- Unaddressed trauma from parental incarceration may negatively impact a child's cognitive performance in school (e.g., the ability to process information, apply knowledge, and engage in problem solving).
- Children with incarcerated parents are more likely than similarly situated children, who have not experienced parental incarceration, to fail or drop out of school.



IMPACTS ON FAMILIES' ECONOMIC AND HOUSING STABILITY⁷

- Children with incarcerated parents are more prone to economic hardship and homelessness, which increases their risk of experiencing toxic stress.
- Family income declines 22 percent while a father is incarcerated.
- Paternal incarceration increases the risk of child homelessness, due in part to increased economic hardship for single mothers.



IMPACTS ON FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS⁸

- Many incarcerated fathers remain committed, or develop a new commitment, to being a parent and continue to parent from prison as best they can, but they inevitably face challenges in their relationships with their children and coparents.
- In research studies, children have spoken positively of their incarcerated parent, reported high feelings of affection toward them, and indicated they want a relationship with them.
- Logistical issues may prevent or make it difficult for children and families to visit or have reliable phone contact.
 - Families face transportation and financial barriers if parents are housed in correctional facilities far away from a child's home.
 - Institutional policies often restrict visiting times and make phone contact difficult and expensive.
- Mothers and other caregivers face unique challenges when the father is incarcerated, which puts them at increased risk for depression and feelings of life dissatisfaction.
- Relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children may be further strained by the challenges faced by their coparents.

⁶ Information in this section is drawn from Turney & Haskins, 2014; Haskins, 2014; and Nichols & Loper, 2012.

⁷ Information in this section is drawn from Geller et al., 2009; Elderbroom et al., 2018; and Wildeman, 2014.

⁸ Information in this section is drawn from Charles et al., 2019; Dunlea et al., 2020; Wildeman et al., 2012; and Puhlman & Pasley, 2017.

Correctional-Based Strategies to Improve Support for Children and Families with Incarcerated Fathers



The Importance of Maintaining Relationships Between Incarcerated Parents and Their Children

Maintaining the relationship with an incarcerated parent—absent a history of actual abuse or neglect—while ensuring they have access to positive opportunities turns out to be one of the best things we can do for the child. Among other advantages, contact minimizes the chance the child will cling to unrealistically frightening or idealized images of the absent parent.

(Ann Adalist-Estrin, quoted in Lefer, 2014)

Fatherhood programs can work with correctional agencies to provide direct services for incarcerated fathers and/or advocate for adoption of policies and strategies that actively support ongoing contact and communication between fathers and their children. Before implementing services in prisons or jails, fatherhood practitioners must understand the mission and general practices of correctional agencies, confirm their support, get a sense of the number of fathers incarcerated and their needs, and be patient when working with correctional staff.

For example, fatherhood practitioners can:

- Share information with correctional agencies on:
 - The importance of father-child relationships for the well-being of their children.
 - The potential for children to suffer negative impacts if they are separated from their father due to incarceration.
 - The potential negative impact on coparenting and other family relationships, and subsequent impacts for children.
- Encourage correctional administrators to review policies and practices that may negatively impact fathers' relationships with their children, coparents, and other family members.
- Suggest ways these policies and practices might be improved and lead to better outcomes for fathers, children, and families.
- Offer to provide fatherhood program staff who can work directly with incarcerated fathers, in groups or individually, to build and strengthen their parenting and relationship knowledge and skills.
- Develop, and agree to, a written agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) documenting the respective roles and responsibilities for the fatherhood program and correctional agency.

1

ENSURE ADMINISTRATIVE AND STAFF SUPPORT

- Provide adequate training for correctional staff who engage with families.
 - This training should focus on the needs and realities faced by children and families of incarcerated parents and include self-awareness activities to help staff understand their conscious and unconscious assumptions, beliefs, and biases concerning incarcerated parents.
- Conduct thorough assessments with fathers, children, and other family members to accurately assess their needs.
 - Clearly articulate the purpose of the assessment and how the information will be used. Clear communication will help build trust with fathers and their families. When assessments are done in a correctional setting, it is best to have a non-uniform staff member (e.g., fatherhood case manager, program facilitator) conduct the assessment.
- Continually review and conduct additional assessments over time to monitor progress and changes in needs.
 - Document how fathers' needs change, especially around the time of their release from jail or prison. Some facilities reassess people in prisons every six months.

2

IMPLEMENT PRACTICES TO FACILITATE FAMILY SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION⁹

Fatherhood practitioners can work with correctional administrators to identify, design, and jointly implement practices that remove barriers to father-child contact and communication in prisons and jails. For example:

- Support engagement of fathers in their children's schooling by allowing them to:
 - Join parent-teacher conferences or participate in counseling sessions by phone or video.
 - Read the same books as their children are required to read for school.
- Make visiting spaces more appealing to children.
 - Decorate the walls with color or murals.
 - Offer toys, games, or books for children to play with.
- Allow visits where children and parents can embrace, play, and engage with each other.
 - Limit the use of plexiglass to separate parents and children.
 - If plexiglass is in place, offer the same books or worksheets on each side of the plexiglass so that parents can do activities with their children during the visit.
- Host family activity days, holiday events, father-child dances, and similar types of events.
- Make sure families have up-to-date information about visiting schedules, rules, facility closures, and scheduled prisoner transfers.
 - Updates can be provided via facility websites, text, email, or other written communications.
- Provide support to families.
 - Help visiting family members cover the cost of travel expenses and overnight accommodations.
 - Share advice on developmentally appropriate ways to explain a parent's incarceration to their children.

⁹ These tips are drawn from Ervin et al., 2020; Vann, 2021; Peterson et al., 2019; and Eddy & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2019.

Ways for Fathers to Connect with Their Children Across a Glass or Plexiglass Barrier¹⁰

In addition to offering books and worksheets on both sides of the plexiglass, facilities could provide dry erase markers that fathers and children can use to:

- ✓ Draw around each other's faces (this encourages eye contact).
- ✓ Play a game such as Pictionary, tic-tac-toe, or charades.
- ✓ Draw something together. A father and child could take turns to draw a line or shape, or the father could start a drawing and let his child complete the picture.
 - Whatever approach a family decides on, they often end up with something interesting and creative—and it can also help children develop social and artistic skills!

3

OFFER PHONE CALLS AND OTHER PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATIONS¹¹

If children live far from where their parents are incarcerated, they may not be able to visit. Correctional facilities can facilitate parent-child contact by allowing phone calls and encouraging other forms of communication. Phone calls allow parents to address children's immediate needs more readily than visits; letters are tangible communications that also serve as memories for parents and children. Recommended communication strategies are as follows:

- Make free phone calls available so that fathers can more easily talk with their children and families. If it is not feasible to allow free phone calls, find ways to reduce or subsidize the cost.
- Coach fathers before, during, and after phone calls with their children.
- Provide supplies for and encourage letter writing to children.
- Allow video calls and/or partner with a community organization to facilitate video visits with families.
- Provide fathers with tips on writing letters to their children and opportunities to create art projects for their children.
 - Some programs have helped dads create picture books or handkerchief art.
 - Other programs have focused on making audio or video tapes of dads reading a story to share with their children.



¹⁰ Adapted from Higgins, 2020.

¹¹ For additional information about these and other strategies, see Adalist-Estrin, 2020 and Vann, 2021.

4

PROVIDE CURRICULUM-BASED PROGRAMS FOR INCARCERATED FATHERS

Curriculum-based programs provide fathers with opportunities to refine and practice their parenting and relationship skills during incarceration and prepare for their return to their families and communities. To ensure that curriculum-based parenting curricula are successfully implemented in correctional settings, programs should:

- Ensure that facilitators are trained to implement the curriculum.
- Engage fathers' partners and coparents in the program, if they are willing, and let them know how engagement would benefit them.
- Encourage coparents to provide feedback on the program to enhance evaluation of program outcomes.
- Identify and troubleshoot anticipated implementation challenges to help program delivery run smoothly.

What Research Says About Evidenced-Based Programs

Two evidenced-based curricula that have shown benefits for incarcerated fathers, their children, and their coparents are Parenting Inside Out and InsideOut Dad.¹² Workshops may be led by correctional staff and/or staff from community-based partners. Research indicates that:

- Incarcerated parents (50 percent of whom were fathers) who participated in Parenting Inside Out classes in Oregon were less likely to be re-arrested after they were released from prison and more likely to be involved in their children's lives. They also showed fewer symptoms of depression and reported less substance misuse than their peers who did not participate (Eddy et al., 2013).
- Fathers who participated in an InsideOut Dad program reported that they felt more empowered and confident in their ability to parent and that the skills they learned through the program were beneficial to them (Turner et al., 2020).

¹² For more information on these two curricula, see <http://www.parentinginsideout.org> and <https://www.fatherhood.org>. For a list of other curricula, see [NRFC's Compendium of Curricula Used by Fatherhood Programs](#).

Research Suggests that Supporting Healthy Family Relationships Could Facilitate Successful Reentry

Various forms of support have shown promise in studies, including family-friendly visits, group parenting and relationship education classes, and assistance in maintaining contact with family members during incarceration.

(Lindquist, et al., 2016)

5

OFFER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE PROGRAMS¹³

Providing educational opportunities and workforce readiness programs can help parents prepare for their return to the community and be better prepared to meet their financial needs and those of their families. Correctional facilities can help parents prepare for their return to the community by:

- Providing General Education Diploma (GED) and High School Equivalent (HSE) educational opportunities for incarcerated parents who do not have a high school diploma.
- Partnering with local colleges and universities to provide college courses.
- Providing specific job training for occupations such as welding and plumbing.
- Partnering with local businesses to implement work release programs and hire recently released parents.
- Working with community organizations to provide wrap-around services that fully support parents before and after they are hired. This can involve developing and implementing an employment plan, providing support to overcome barriers such as transportation and housing, and following up to evaluate their success at the job over time.

Job Training Example¹⁴

The RIDGE organization in Ohio developed a unique training opportunity whereby fathers can participate in a commercial driver's license (CDL) program, which is provided in prisons for participants who would like to become truck drivers upon their release.



¹³ Tips adapted from Fontaine & Kurs, 2017.

¹⁴ Vann, 2021

Community-Based Strategies to Improve Support for Children and Families with Incarcerated Father

In this section, we present strategies for the consideration of fatherhood programs and other community-based service providers who have committed to developing support services for children and families with incarcerated fathers. Due to the compounding negative impacts of parental incarceration and other co-occurring risk factors, programs and services should be designed to understand and address the unique barriers faced by these children and families. Organizations could integrate topics related to parental incarceration into existing curricula or workshops, so the content is relevant for children with an incarcerated parent.

Although research has documented how children and families affected by the incarceration of fathers can benefit from participation in community-based support services designed to meet their needs (Geller et al., 2012), the availability of effective services is limited in many communities. Funding sources may limit a fatherhood program's ability to provide support directly to children and families with incarcerated fathers, but opportunities may be available to partner with schools and community-based service providers (e.g., Head Start, Healthy Start, Home Visiting programs).

For example, fatherhood practitioners could:

- Identify key staff of local programs that may be interested in partnering or identifying other potential partners (e.g., school counselors, program administrators, home visitors, Head Start teachers, mental health counselors, health care providers, child welfare personnel).
- Discuss the range of services the fatherhood program provides, especially any services provided for incarcerated fathers or fathers returning to the community.
- Share research and emphasize the impacts of paternal incarceration on children and families.
- Discuss potential ways to partner to ensure support for children and families during and after paternal incarceration.
- Formalize partnerships by developing clear, written agreements between organizations. For example, a MOU or a contract will help prevent any misunderstandings about the terms of the partnership and the role of each organization.

Working with Children with Incarcerated Parents: Tips for Practitioners

- Explore interventions that can bolster children's additional protective factors, which in turn could help prevent antisocial behaviors. These may include programs to help connect youth with their schools, prosocial adults, and healthy after-school activities.
- To begin serving these children effectively, all service providers should ask the families they serve if they have been affected by parental incarceration. The first step in effectively providing care for these youth is to know who they are.

(Wheeler, M. in Shlafer et al., 2013, p. 16)



ENGAGE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN PROGRAM DESIGN

Program providers should involve families during program planning to ensure their voices are heard, planned services are relevant, and their participation in services is encouraged.

- Solicit input from families via surveys, focus groups, family interviews, or community meetings.
- Ask families to describe the challenges they face.
- Involve families in designing potential solutions.
- Ask school counselors, home visitors, Head Start teachers, and others who interact with children with incarcerated fathers to provide input on the children's needs and suggestions for how to provide supportive services.
- Create advisory boards of adult children and caregivers who have experienced the incarceration of a loved one, along with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated fathers, to inform program development and implementation.



COORDINATE WITH SCHOOLS

Programs that engage families in supporting their children's learning are linked to improved student achievement. Parent-teacher conferences provide a unique opportunity for incarcerated parents to engage with their children, meet their child's teachers, and offer support to the children's caregiver. Students typically perform better if they see that their incarcerated parent, caregiver, and school are working together, as a team, in their best interest.¹⁵

Fatherhood programs and other community service providers could:

- Establish partnerships with schools, government agencies, law enforcement, and other service providers to create a process by which teachers and school counselors are notified when children are exposed to trauma, violence, or parental incarceration.
- Engage with teachers and school staff to create a referral pathway when children show signs that they need services.
- Assist with communication and coordination between schools and caregivers.
- Work with schools and corrections agencies to facilitate opportunities for incarcerated parents to participate in parent-teacher conferences via telephone or videoconference.



OFFER MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

Early research findings indicate a range of potential benefits for children who participate in a well-designed mentoring program, including positive effects on their emotional well-being, social relationships, and academic achievement.¹⁶ Rather than treating all children with incarcerated parents the same, mentoring programs should be tailored to the specific needs and challenges of each child.

¹⁵ See <https://www.doc.wa.gov/family/conferences.htm#participation> for information on a Washington State Department of Corrections program to facilitate incarcerated parents' participation in parent-teacher conferences.

¹⁶ Jarjoura et al., 2013

Examples of Successful Mentoring Programs

- Amachi, Inc. first implemented its “Amachi model” of community-based one-to-one mentoring for children with incarcerated parents in 2000 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Since then, Amachi programs have expanded across the country and partnered with several Big Brothers Big Sisters programs. A randomized control evaluation of a Big Brothers Big Sisters program implementing the Amachi model in Texas showed that the program improved children’s short- and long-term outcomes (ICF International, 2011).
- Additional programs such as the Seedling Mentor Program and the U.S. Dream Academy offer mentoring opportunities for children with incarcerated parents.

Research suggests that mentoring programs need to take the following steps to be successful:¹⁷

- Provide thorough training and support to ensure that mentors understand the complexities of children’s home lives and are committed to the mentoring relationship.
- Set clear expectations for the frequency and amount of mentor-child contact.
- Establish a structured process for ending the mentoring relationship.
- Ask if participants have been affected by parental incarceration.
- Assess the risk and protective factors of each child.
- Develop action plans for each individual child based on their risk and needs.
- Help the mentor communicate and coordinate with the mentee’s caregiver and the parent in prison or jail.
- Ensure that mentors:
 - Understand how a parent’s incarceration has impacted their mentee.
 - Serve as a positive role model by exhibiting personal integrity, healthy behaviors, and concern for others.
 - Provide active guidance to help their mentee set and work toward personal goals.
 - Advocate for resources to address the mentee’s needs.
 - Cultivate their mentee’s strengths.
 - Are consistent with follow-through and perceived as trustworthy by their mentee.
 - Work with the mentee’s primary caregiver to identify mentee needs and demonstrate respect for the caregiver’s wishes.

Assess Risk and Protective Factors for Each Child

Youth of different risk profiles benefit differently from youth mentoring. Youth with high individual risk (such as depression or academic failure) and low environment risk (such as poverty) may benefit the most from one-to-one mentoring.... As a movement, youth mentoring programs need to do more to fit our services to the unique risk and protective profiles of individual youth.

(Wheeler, M. in Shlafer et al., 2013, p. 16)

¹⁷ Information for this section is drawn from Jarjoura et al., 2013, and Shlafer et al., 2013.

Research Shows Caregivers Bear Numerous Burdens

Research shows that caregivers, coparents, and other family members also face negative impacts of parental incarceration including feelings of stigma and shame associated with having a family member in prison, increased financial strain, physical and emotional stress, lack of external resources, and other barriers to fostering relationships between children and their father in prison.

(National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated, 2014)



PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR COPARENTS AND OTHER CAREGIVERS

Support services could include individual counseling and support groups. All services should:

- Recognize and address the stress and trauma experienced by the caregivers of children with incarcerated fathers.
- Provide guidance on how to provide the best mental and emotional support for the children in their care.
- Include access to mental health services for caregivers.

To ensure caregiver support groups are implemented effectively, programs should:

- Ensure the support group is facilitated by mental health or social work professionals who have experience working with people impacted by incarceration.
- Offer the support group in a caregiver's primary spoken language.
- Hold the group in a private room or space that helps participants feel comfortable and ready to engage and share in the discussion.
- Find a location that is accessible for participants.
- Hold the community-based group at a time convenient for participant.
- If possible, schedule the group when child care is available.
- Consider the possibility of providing support groups before or after facility visiting times.





PROVIDE ASSISTANCE WITH TRANSPORTATION AND CHILD CARE

Family members often need help to overcome challenges that limit their ability to communicate with or visit incarcerated fathers. They may live far away from the correctional facilities where fathers are housed and be burdened by overnight expenses, the cost of phone calls, lack of affordable child care, and correctional policies and procedures that are not family friendly. Services that community-based organizations could provide include:

- Free or low-cost transportation to and from correctional facilities so children and family members can visit their incarcerated parent.
- Accessible transportation for people who are physically impaired.
- Car seats for children.
- Multiple drop-off and pick-up locations that are easily accessible by public transportation.
- Partnerships with correctional facilities to ensure that the transportation schedule is posted on their websites and in their visitor lobbies.
- Partnerships with community providers to offer child care during prison visiting times and/or during community workshops and support groups.

Tips for Parents and Caregivers¹⁸

Fatherhood programs and/or their community partners can share the following tips with parents and caregivers and reinforce these ideas through programming:

- ✓ Address any confusion children are experiencing as a result of their father's absence.
- ✓ Answer questions from children honestly with age-appropriate truths.
- ✓ Allow children to express themselves.
- ✓ Check in regularly with children about their feelings and be aware that these may change frequently.
- ✓ Encourage children to write letters to their father sharing news from their lives.
- ✓ Establish routines (e.g., try to stick to regular times for meals and bedtime, read a bedtime story, and, if possible, schedule a regular phone or video call with the incarcerated father).
- ✓ Remain positive about the coparenting relationship with the incarcerated father and work with them to maintain a parenting relationship with their child.

¹⁸ Adapted from Adalist-Estrin, 2021.

Helpful Resources

- The American Correctional Association released a tip sheet on implementing effective parent-teacher conferences. The [tip sheet](#) includes tips to help incarcerated dads stay involved with their children's education.
- Brennan, E., McCormick, M., Sarfo, B., & Manno, M. S. (2021). [Six recommendations for supporting families affected by parental incarceration: A review of the literature](#). Drawing on a recent investigation of family-strengthening programs, this brief provides six recommendations for designing, developing, and implementing services for children and families with incarcerated parents.
- DADication: An NRFC documentary exploring the challenges of fatherhood. <https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/dadication-documentary-exploring-challenges-fatherhood>
- The [European Journal on Parental Imprisonment](#) is an annual publication focused on the study of issues relevant to children affected by parental incarceration and suggestions to promote their well-being.
 - The Volume 9, 2020 issue, [Perspectives on keeping connected during a pandemic: Challenges to child rights and well-being](#), includes articles by Ann Adalist-Estrin and Sarah Higgins, which provide helpful tips and strategies for helping children connect with their fathers during virtual and in-person prison visits.
- Hollins, W. Q. (2022). [Supporting children of incarcerated parents in schools: foregrounding youth voices to improve educational support](#). This 2022 publication draws on qualitative research to provide useful information and tips for supporting children in schools. The author also draws on her own experience as the child of an incarcerated parent and paints a vivid picture that throws light on the many sides of this issue.
- The [National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated](#) has a wide range of resources pertaining to incarcerated parents and their families, including:
 - [Directory of programs serving children and families of the incarcerated](#).
 - [The children with incarcerated parents library](#) (free downloadable pamphlets for parents, caregivers, and professionals – in English and Spanish).
 - [Books for parents, caregivers, and professionals to read with children with incarcerated parents](#).
 - [Homecoming: Children's adjustment to parent's parole](#).
- The Urban Institute has a library of resources, including [Model practices for parents in prisons and jails: reducing barriers to family connections](#).
- Washington State Department of Corrections has a [video](#) and [posters in English](#) and [Spanish](#) to encourage inmate participation in parent-teacher-student teleconferences.
- [Youth.gov](#) provides research, tips, and resources on many topics related to positive youth development, including resources specifically on children with incarcerated parents and mentoring.



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This information brief was developed by Storm Ervin and Lindsey Cramer (Urban Institute) and Nigel Vann (Fathers Incorporated) on behalf of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. Ann Adalist-Estrin (National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated) reviewed the document and provided helpful feedback and suggestions.

Suggested citation:

Storm, E., Cramer, L., & Vann, N. (2022). Providing support for children and families with incarcerated fathers: Tips for fatherhood practitioners and other service providers. [Information Brief]. National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.

